DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 101 230 CG 009 434

AUTHOR Hartlage, Lawrence C.
TITLE A Decade of Change in Employer Attitudes Toward Epilepsy.
PUB DATE Aug 74
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the American Psychological Association Convention (82nd, New Orleans, Louisiana, August 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Changing Attitudes; *Employer Attitudes; Employment Problems; *Epilepsy; Handicapped; *Longitudinal Studies; Research Projects; Speeches; Symposia

ABSTRACT

The attitudes of parents and peers toward handicaps, particularly epilepsy, play an important part in determining how debilitating the handicap may actually be. This project compared attitudes of employers toward epilepsy in the early 1960's with their attitudes in the current decade. As a control for possible generalized shifts in employer attitudes toward worker's with any type of handicap, employer attitudes toward workers with two other types of potentially handicapping conditions were also measured. There was a marked improvement in employer attitudes toward workers with epilepsy between 1962 and 1972 with statistically significant improvement in overall attitudes, and in views of epileptic workers' need for supervision and ability to adjust to changing work situations. Employer attitudes toward workers with emotional disturbances or with a history of juvenile delinquency did show slight improvement, but it was not significant. (Author/PC)

ED101230

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

for APA Div. 22 Symposium, New Orleans, 1974

A DECADE OF CHANGE IN EMPLOYER ATTITUDES TOWARD EPILEPSY

Lawrence C. Hartlage

Medical College of Georgia

In any handicapping condition, the attitudes of parents and peers toward the condition play an important part in determining how debilitating the handicap may be. Especially in the case of epilepsy, which for many years has been viewed with superstition and embellished by myths, attitudes toward the disease may provide conditions much more handicapping than the actual disease. The importance of attitudes toward epilepsy as a determinant of how handicapping the disease may be is probably most manifest in the attitudes of employers, since if employers are unwilling to provide employment to workers with epilepsy then epilepsy becomes a significant vocational handicap.

Over the past decade, there have been accelerated efforts in public education concerning epilepsy and a number of other handicapping conditions, but there is little documentation of the relationship of increasing educational efforts and increased acceptance of or improved attitudes toward individuals with these handicaps.

This project compared attitudes of employers toward epilepsy in the early 1960's, with their attitude toward epilepsy ten years later. As a control for possible generalized shifts in employer attitudes toward workers with any type of handicap, employer attitudes toward workers with two other types of potentially handicapping conditions were also measured.

Method

During 1962 and 1963, 1380 employers were studied for receptivity toward different types of handicapped workers, including workers with epilepsy,

CG 009 437

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

emotional disturbance, and a history of juvenile delinquency. Employers were chosen by taking the directory of all employers in one large and moderate sized city in a midwestern state, stratifying employers with categories based on size and type of industry, and then randomly selecting every fourth employer in each stratification category. Half the employers were contacted by personal interviewer, and the remainder were surveyed by mailed questionnaires. Variables studied included employer attitudes toward workers with the different types of handicaps on such variables as their reliability, work tolerance, need for supervision, absenteeism, coworker relationships, ability to adjust to new job situations, and ability to tolerate job pressure. Previous testing with employers had demonstrated the reliability of the interview/questionnaire, and the relevance of the items to areas of concern to employers (Hartlage, 1964). All employers were assured of anonymity, other than a coding on the response chart for size and type of industry.

During 1971-1973, using the same stratification and combination of personal interview-mail survey procedure, a follow-up ten percent random sample of employers was contacted, using the same questionnaire. Due to some sample situation due to non response to a few employers contacted by mailed survey, the total number of employers contacted in the second survey was 124.

Overall receptivity indices were computed by averaging each employer's attitudes on the five point questionnaire, whereon a score of 5 indicated a very unreceptive attitude, a score of 1 indicated a very receptive attitude, and a score of 3 indicated no discrimination between workers with and without the specific handicaps.

Separate t tests for correlated groups were computed for receptivity measures on each of the seven employer attitudes toward workers with epilepsy,

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

between the 1962 and 1972 means. Similar t tests were computed between 1962 and 1972 overall receptivity measures for workers with epilepsy, emotional disturbances, and a history of juvenile delinquency. To see if there was any difference in attitudes of employers contacted in person or by mailed questionnaire, t tests were calculated on receptivity measures of employers within a given stratified group, between employers interviewed personally and those who responded by mail.

Results

There was a marked improvement in attitudes of employers toward workers with epilepsy between 1962 and 1972, with statistically significant improvement in overall attitudes, and in views of epileptic workers' need for supervision and their ability to adjust to changing work situations (Table 1). The employer attitudes toward workers with emotional disturbances,

- -

Insert Table 1 about here

- -

or with a history of juvenile delinquency, did show a slight improvement, but the improvement in attitudes of employers toward these latter groups was not significant (Table 2). Interestingly, in 1962 employers reported more

- -

Insert Table 2 about here

- -

negative attitudes toward epileptic workers than toward workers with the other types of handicaps, while in 1972 workers with epilepsy were viewed more favorably than either of the other types of handicapped workers.

There were no significant differences in receptivity measures between employers whose responses were obtained by interview or by mailed questionnaire.

Discussion

The fact that employer attitudes toward workers with epilepsy improved at a significant level over the ten year period covered by the study, while attitudes toward the workers with other types of handicaps showed only slight and nonsignificant improvement, offers encouragement that efforts to alleviate some of the stigma of epilepsy are showing results beyond what might be attributable to a possible generalized improvement in employer attitude toward handicapped workers. There is the possibility that employers may view more favorably those workers whose handicaps are of an organic rather than social or interpersonal nature (e.g., Hartlage, 1973), but the fact that employers viewed epilepsy as the most handicapping of the 3 conditions in 1962, and as the least handicapping of the same three conditions in 1972, further supports the conclusion that employer receptivity toward workers with epilepsy has improved at a rate disproportionate to attitudes toward the other two conditions.

In light of the fact that a receptivity score of 3.0 represents employer attitudes toward nonhandicapped workers, the mean receptivity index of 3.36 viewed by employers as being handicapped to some extent. Areas of greatest apparent concern to employers involved the reliability (index 3.87), co-worker relationships (3.55), and ability to tolerate pressure (3.52) of epileptic workers, whereas employers did view epileptic workers as apparently better than average on their work tolerance (2.71).

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Although not all employers were asked whether they had knowingly hired workers with epilepsy in the 1962 survey, fewer than 5% of those who were questioned reported having knowingly hired workers with epilepsy. In the 1972 survey, on the other hand, all employers were asked this question, and the number of affirmative responses was just over 12%. Due to the confidential nature of the method of recording the data, however, it was not possible to determine whether the improved receptivity toward workers with epilepsy was directly related to employers having epileptic workers was due to some other causes. In any case, however, these data do lend tenitative support to a conclusion that employers are not only expressing more favorable attitudes toward epilepsy, but may also be translating these attitudes into affirmative hiring practices.

One more indirect source of encouragement involved the fact that there were no differences in receptivity expressed by employers contacted personally compared to those contacted by mail, since this provides some basis for speculation that the attitudes expressed by employers are relatively independent of how they were measured, and thus may represent relatively stable measures of their actual attitudes.

In any case, data seem to be in fairly consistent accord with a trend toward improvement of employer attitudes toward workers with epilepsy over the recent ten year period, perhaps reflecting in part some attenuation of employer perceptions of the stigma of epilepsy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

EMPLOYER RATING OF ATTITUDES OF WORKERS WITH EPILEPSY, 1962 and 1972

Attitude Variable	1962 Mean	1972 Mean
Need for Supervision	4.80	3.39*
Work Tolerance	3.89	2.71
Reliability	3.90	3.87
Tolerating Pressure	3.84	3.52
Trouble Adjusting	4.34	3.16*
Coworker Relationships	3.68	3.55
Absenteeism	3.66	3.31
OVERALL	4.018	3.358*

*$p < .01$

Table 2

CHANGE IN EMPLOYER RECEPTIVITY TOWARD THREE TYPES OF HANDICAPS, 1962 and 1972

TYPE OF HANDICAP	OVERALL MEAN RECEPTIVITY INDEX		
	1962	1972	Change
Epilepsy	4.02	3.36	+.66*
Emotional Disturbance	3.62	3.49	+.13
History of Juvenile Delinquency	3.88	3.62	+.26

*Statistically significant, $p < .01$

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

REFERENCES

1. Hartlage, L.C. Community expectations and psychiatric rehabilitation. American Journal of Psychiatry, 1964, 121, 67-69.

2. Hartlage, L.C., Roland, P.E., and Taraba, D. Perceptions of various types of disabilities by employers. Psychological Aspects of Disability, 1971, 18(3), 122-124.